Fears and Hatred Fed Bitterness

By W. A. WILSON
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Special to the Colonist

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One Person in Four Jobless or on Relief

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GANDER, Nfld.—At the heart of this island's bitter labor dispute, and controversial course, was the sincere belief that its economy was in danger of being completely shattered.

This fear grew in an atmosphere that has been well-prepared by both the strike itself and other factors.

Newfoundland has proportionately the heaviest unemployment in Canada. Its economy is narrowly based and is in a severe recession. Two newsprint operations account for about half this province's total economy. The rest is supplied by the fishing industry, which failed last year through a poor catch; mining which is contracting through the closure of one mine and impending heavy layoff in another, and the American bases.

123,000 Jobless

Opposition Leader Malcolm Hollett estimates that 123,000 people out of a total population of about 450,000 are living on relief or unemployment insurance and while other estimates are lower, they are all painfully high.

Violence to which the island was not accustomed in labor disputes had startled and shocked people, many of whom believe that an American union was trying to take over by gangsters' methods. And there was a correct understanding that H. Landon Ladd, the loggers' leader, had launched more than a fight over wage rates and was touching on the province's social structure.

There had been no calm, conciliatory voice from anyone in authority calling for a peaceful settlement. There had been much that was highly inflammatory from both company and union.

Lacked Dignity

There is precedent in Canada for a government decision that a strike threatens the general economy to the point that it must be terminated.

One of the few criticisms of their recent affairs which most Newfoundlanders accept involves a comparison arising from this. They agree that when Prime Minister Louis St. Laurent decided to terminate a general railroad strike he acted with dignity and in an atmosphere of gravity which no one attempted to destroy. By contrast, it is recognized even by Premier Smallwood's supporters, the action against the IWA was done without dignity and involved much that was intemperate.

This admission does not, however, detract from the strength of their support for the government's action, which is clearly widespread in Newfoundland. The manner in which the action was taken is written off as part of Mr. Smallwood's flamboyance.

Economy Threat

The government's stated case for its action was the threat to the economy. Two threats of varying degrees of reality, were in fact involved.

A newsprint operation involves a cycle of work in the woods— cutting pulp wood in the summer; hauling it to rivers in the winter, driving it in the spring after the breakup. If one phase is missed the inevitable result will be a shortage of wood at the mill later on, which could only partially be met from stockpiles. There was a serious danger that if the strike continued, the mill would run out of wood and close down temporarily next summer. The effect of this on Newfoundland's economy would have been severe in terms of unemployment and lost personal incomes.

H. LANDON LADD
. . . IWA leader

The other threat, given wide credence but apparently seldom critically analysed, was contained in a statement issued by the presidents of the two newsprint companies, Anglo-Newfoundland and Bowaters. They said that, rather than deal with the IWA, they would close down and it was widely believed they meant what they said and would close permanently. This frightened a great many people.

Premier Smallwood was not, however, among those who believed them. During a three hour interview at his home, this reporter asked whether he thought the companies actually would have closed permanently.

"Permanently? Never," Mr. Smallwood replied. "I believe they would have shut down temporarily — six months or so."

Well Regarded

Those whom the threat frightened apparently never examined it. There would be no precedent in modern company management for two firms to wreck a province's economy because they hated a trade union. These two companies are both well-regarded by great numbers of the people of Newfoundland and they have no history for brutality. In addition, both have huge investments in Newfoundland—they own great tracts of the country outright which saves them from cordage tax on their wood; they have many miles of roads built at their own expense, towns with housing and other permanent facilities and their mills. In addition, Bowater operates under an agreement granted a predecessor company exempting it from all provincial taxation and Premier Smallwood says Anglo-Newfoundland contributes "very little" directly to the provincial treasury.

The company statement did, however, add to the bitterness since it caused fear among those who believed it and hatred among most of those who didn't.

The company's public relation have been horrible," commented one prominent St. John's man who is strongly opposed to the IWA.

"I'll make a confession to you," Premier Smallwood said at his home during the interview. "I had turned implacably against the IWA from the beginning of the strike, from the occupying of the company's camps, that first unlawful act.

"When I say implacably I mean implacably. Every fresh act of violence turned me more. If they had known how I felt I doubt if they (other labor organizations) would have asked me to intervene.

'Saw Eye-to-Eye'

"I intervened on the night of the 48th day without a hint to any one except the cabinet and the leader of the opposition. I consulted with him and he with his party. I had made up my mind if there was any danger of it developing into a partisan issue I would ask for dissolution and go to the people.

"There was never any need for that. We saw eye-to-eye. We felt it was a time for public men to be patriotic.

The opposition's four members met at Mr. Hollett's home for four hours that night and decided to support the government.

"There were times when the opposition was tougher than we were." Mr. Smallwood continued. "Mr. Hollett said 'I'd gladly take my own gun and go after them.' We never went that far. It's a revelation of the depth of feeling, that coming from this life-long magistrate, Rhodes Scholar and war veteran."

'Pioneer' Becomes Historian

R. E. Nimmo, for 34 years secretary of the Saanich Pioneer Society, resigned the position at the annual meeting of the group held at Saanichton and accepted appointment as historian.

Successful year's operation was reported by all officers of the organization, which was formed in 1923 to perpetuate the history of the peninsula.

Willard Michell was re-elected president of the society. Other officers are Lorne Thomson, first vice-president; Mrs. William Symons, second vice-president; Mrs. Lorne Thomson, secretary; Mrs. William Bethel, treasurer, and Alan Calvert, auditor.

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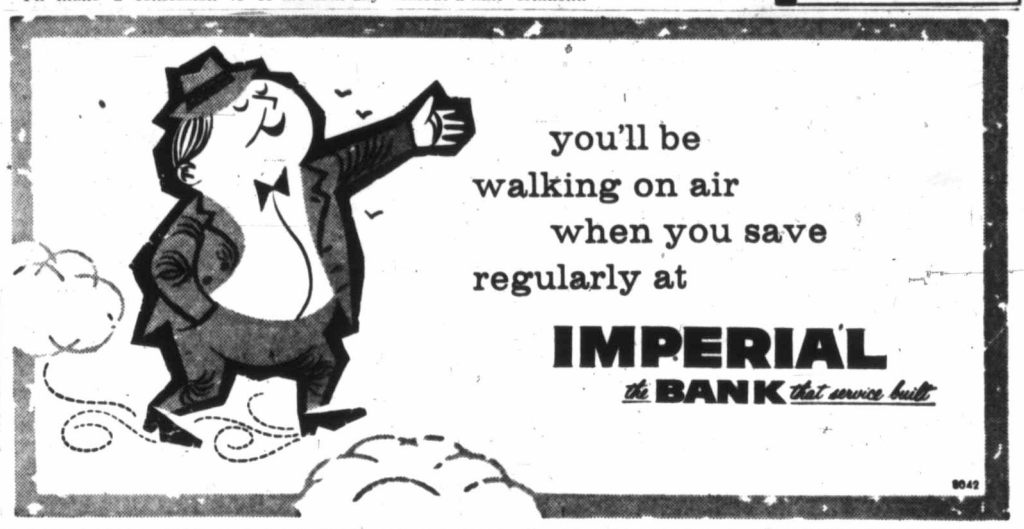

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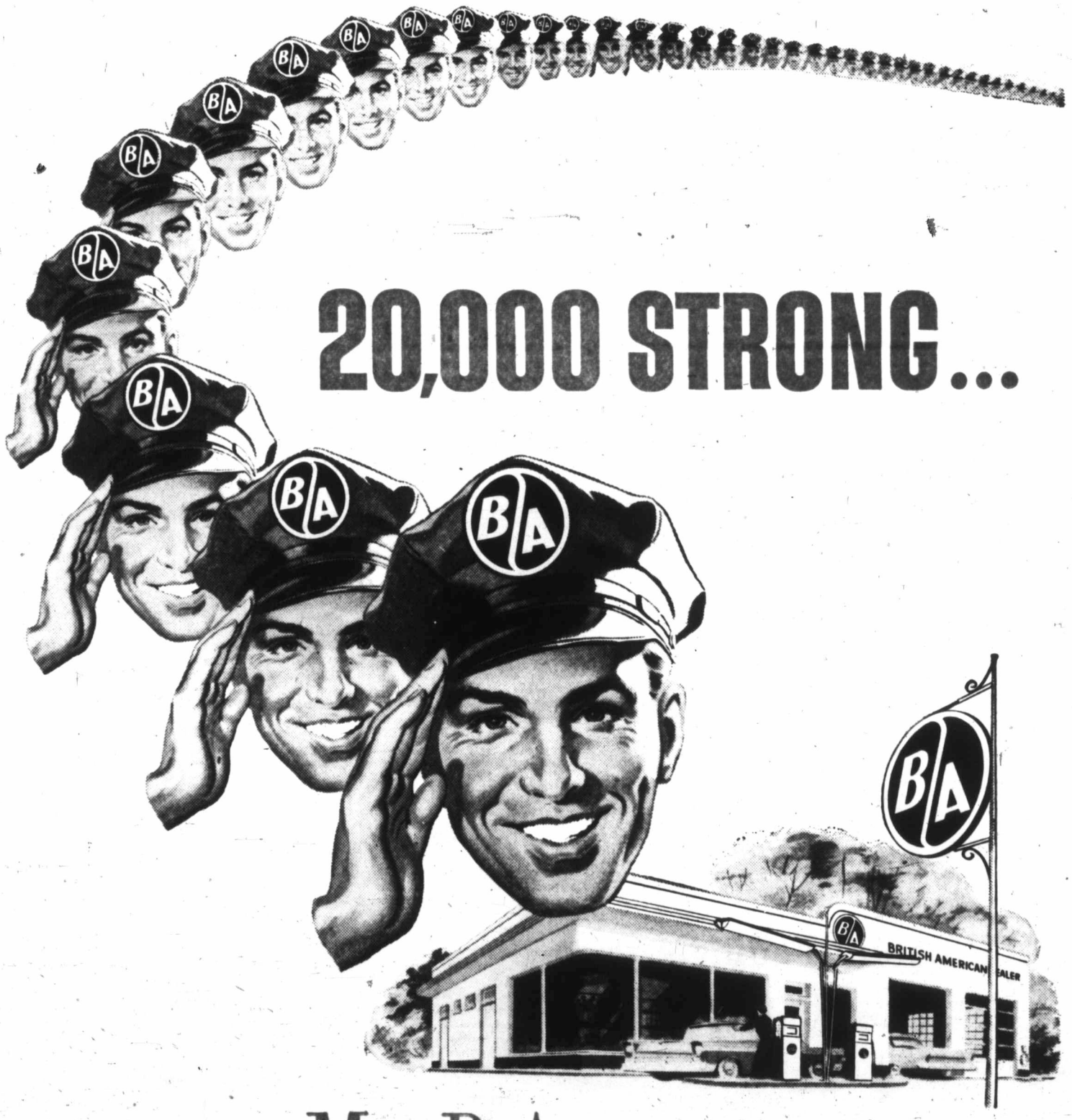

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